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TENG HSIAO-PING CONFIRMS CHOU EN-LAI'S HEALTH WORSENING

OW399646 HONG KONG AFP IN ENGLISH 0632 GMT 9 OCT 75 OW

(BY RENE FLIPO)

(TEXT) PEKING, OCT 9 (AFP)--DEPUTY PREMIER TENG HSIAO-PING HAS CONFIRMED THAT THE HEALTH OF PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI DETERIORATED RECENTLY.

MR CHOU, 77, HAS BEEN HOSPITALIZED FOR MORE THAN 18 MONTHS FOR AN AS YET UNDISCLOSED AILMENT. DEPUTY PREMIER TENG TOLD A VISITING FOREIGN DIGNITARY A FEW DAYS AGO THAT MR CHOU WAS "NOT IN GOOD CONDITION" AND COULD NO LONGER RECEIVE VISITORS, A DIPLOMAT DISCLOSED HERE TODAY.

OBSERVERS HAD NOTED THAT MR CHOU BROKE WITH CUSTOM AND PROTOCOL BY FAILING TO MEET FORMER BRITISH PRIME MINISTER EDWARD HEATH AND NORTH VIETNAMESE PARTY LEADER LE DUAN WHEN THEY CAME THROUGH PEKING LAST MONTH. BOTH VISITORS MET CHAIRMAN MAO TSE-TUNG.

NOR DID MR CHOU HAVE A MEETING THIS WEEK WITH YUGOSLAV PREMIER DZEMAL BIJEDIC, WHO IS VISITING CHINA AT PRESENT AT HIS INVITATION. MR BIJEDIC WAS LEAVING THE CAPITAL LATER TODAY FOR A SHORT PROVINCIAL TOUR.

CHINESE OFFICIALS TOLD FOREIGN RESIDENTS OF PEKING LAST WEEK THAT MR CHOU WAS UNDER "MEDICAL TREATMENT". IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THE CHINESE HAD ADMITTED THAT THE PREMIER WAS IN THE HOSPITAL FOR REASONS OTHER THAN "FATIGUE" RESULTING FROM HIS ADVANCED AGE.

9 OCT 0729Z JOR/TM